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ABSTRACT

Vocationally at-risk students have one or a combination of handicaps affecting mobility, coordination, communication, self-care and/or cognition which may significantly interfere with the goals of successful student-to-adult transition, namely employment, productive work, and independent community living. A program for students with physical impairments was developed to link educational services with community resources and to encourage collaborative efforts of various disciplines inside and outside of the school system. The program offers vocational courses, expanded occupational therapy services, on-the-job training programs, driver evaluation and education, vocational evaluations, vocational rehabilitation services, post-secondary education/placement options, collaboration with the local community college, and access to the local Center for Independent Living. In the junior year, students, parents, and community agency representatives are encouraged to attend the annual review of the Individualized Education Program, and an Individual Transition Plan is developed. This serves as a vehicle to identify areas of continued or potential need that the student will have as an adult and to address how and by whom needed services can be provided. (JDD)

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PROGRAM PRESENTATION

TITLE: TRANSITION IS EVERYONE'S JOB

DESCRIPTION: This presentation describes a multi-disciplinary transition program for physically impaired high school students. Its key feature is the linkage of educational opportunities with community resources which addresses the students' need for vocational preparation and acquisition of independent living skills.

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TRANSITION IS EVERYONE'S JOB

We live in a society where people commonly define themselves by what they "do". It is regretful that physically impaired people who cannot "do" in the normal way, are often considered to be incapable and unproductive. But those of us who work in exceptional student education know that most of our students want to work and be thought able despite their disabilities. As educators, we must realize that we are no longer serving students who are just "educationally at risk"; we all must gear our attitudes and programs to target and prepare youngsters who are "vocationally at risk" as well.

"Vocationally at risk" students have one, or a combination of handicaps affecting mobility, coordination, communication, self-care and/ or cognition which may significantly interfere with the goals of successful student to adult transition: namely, employment, productive work, and independent community living. Special educators cannot work alone to accomplish these goals; we must fully utilize the professional expertise of ESE personnel who are not teachers; we need to locate and explore community resources and coordinate them with new and existing educational programs.

This presentation will focus on a successful, unified transition program for the physically impaired which is currently in use in Orange County Public Schools in Orlando,

Florida. In our county, students with physical impairments may attend any of our 10 high schools. But almost all students staffed into the PI program are enrolled at one of two high schools with PI staff and facilities. Our teachers, nurses, therapists, and aides serve approximately 50 students with mild to severe physical disabilities which include : cerebral palsy, spina bifida, various muscular dystrophies, traumatic head injuries, arthritis, sickle cell disease and congenital anomalies. Many of our students are multiply handicapped and have associated learning difficulties. Upon graduation, students will receive either a regular or special diploma, depending on the criteria they have been able to master.

Critical transition issues for physically impaired students include: vocational training and placement; community mobility; and independent living skills. The key features of our program are the linkage of educational services with community resources: and the collaborative efforts of various disciplines inside and outside of the school system. We offer:

* Exceptional Student Vocational Courses
* Expanded Occupational Therapy Services
* On The Job Training Programs
* Driver Evaluation and Education
* Vocational Evaluations

* Vocational Rehabilitation Services
* Post Secondary Education / Placement Options
* Collaboration with the Local Community College
* Access to Center for Independent Living

VOCATIONAL COURSES:

Many times, mildly physically impaired students successfully participate with able bodied peers in vocational education courses. For those students who cannot be appropriately served in the mainstream, ESE vocational courses are being taught by certified specialists in industrial arts, business education, agriculture and drivers education.

Physically impaired students can learn to perform many tasks but their rate of learning and production are often slower than their nondisabled peers. To compensate for this, these courses are open ended to allow adequate time for the students to complete course requirements. These courses can be repeated as needed for multiple credits. Consultation and assistance are given to the vocational educators by the occupational therapist and teachers of the physically impaired. Support to the vocational teachers may be provided in the form of suggested curriculum or assignment modifications, teaching strategies and environmental adaptations.

Students who have chosen a vocational track are able to spend

a 1/2 day in a Shared Time Program at one of several vocational centers to gain hands on experience and entry level job skill competencies.

EXPANDED OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SERVICES:

Occupational therapists working in schools have traditionally focused on facilitating developmental and age appropriate motor and self care skills that are necessary for the student to obtain maximum benefit from his/her special education classes. But in our secondary program, the therapists look beyond the immediate educational environment in order to help their students achieve vocational readiness. This is a concept similar in philosophy to that of career development. The therapists strive to facilitate the students' potential to competently engage in productive occupations such as paid work, and daily living skills.

The occupational therapists assess skills the students will need to successfully pursue employment and independent living. We provide specific, individualized programs in self and home management tasks, and work related skills and behaviors. We consult with teachers and students to design environmental modifications for the classrooms and on the job worksites. Additionally, we provide instruction and adaptations in computers and other technology. Home visits have been initiated to integrate and coordinate

therapeutic activites into the student's home environment. The occupational therapists work closely with the ESE school nurses to help students independently manage and perform daily health care procedures.

In another role, the occupational therapist is the liaison between the school and the community agencies. She is responsible for coordinating the students' transition plans so that gaps in service are eliminated and duplication of efforts are avoided.

ON THE JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS

Our school district provides on the job training through its Hospitality, Health and Industry Training Program. Students with varying disabilities, including physical impairments have the opportunity to participate in 3 hours of OJT work at local hospitals, hotels and industry. They receive 3 credits per year towards their graduation requirements and are transported to the job location by school bus. Overall daily supervision is provided by an exceptional education teacher, but each student is assigned to an actual work site supervisor. Students in this program are working towards being job ready upon graduation. They are learning general employability and specific job skills in a "real world" work environment. At the same time, they are developing more positive self concepts and increased feelings of self worth.

Physically impaired high school students who are independently mobile and can manage their own personal care needs are eligible to participate in this program.

DRIVERS EDUCATION:

In our community, accessible public transportation services are quite limited. Therefore, it is very important that our students have the opportunity to learn to drive their own vehicles whenever possible. To do this, after the students obtain physician approval, they are individually evaluated for safe driving potential and necessary vehicle adaptations by the occupational therpists of the Handicapped Driver Evaluator/Trainer Program at Humana Hospital Lucerne, a local rehabilitation center. A summer driver education class at the high school is then offered to these students and individually tailored to accommodate each student's disabilities. The students receive 15 hours of actual driving experience, and the driving instructor takes them for the licensing road test in the school vehicle which is equipped with hand controls and other adaptations.

VOCATIONAL EVALUATION:

In Orange County schools we use work evaluation units currently available in the community to obtain vocational data which is then used by school personnel and

students to select courses, establish Individual Education and Transition Plan goals and to explore career options. The diverse physical and cognitive abilities of physically impaired students in our program necessitates having access to a several test sites. During the school year transportation and attendent care (as needed) are provided and students are given release time from their school program for 3-8 days of evaluation. We use the evaluation services of Mid Florida Technical Institute, Westside Vo-Tech Center, and the Central Florida Sheltered Workshop. The work evaluation reports are placed into the student's cummulative folders and findings are shared with the parents.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES:

During the past several years, we have cultivated a very close working relationship with Vocational Rehabilitation. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor assigned to the school makes a presentation to the parents of 11th and 12th grade physically impaired students in the fall, describing Voc Rehab services and eligibility requirements. He follows up with weekly visits to the school to assess each of the seniors for V.R. eligibility. He interviews, tests and develops rapport with the students to determine what benefits his agency can provide before a final decision is made. As a result of his intensive contact with the students, he has

been able to provide V.R. funding (sometimes for students still in high school) for sophisticated augmentative communication devices, transitional living facility training costs, and tuition for post secondary vocational studies.

POST SECONDARY EDUCATION / PLACEMENT OPTIONS

Our school district does offer two types of special needs post-secondary vocational educational programs. These are designed to be a continuum of education and support services for handicapped students who desire or need additional training following graduation. At two of our adult Vo-tech centers, a transitional program for students who have completed the Hospitality or Shared Time components provides up to 2 years of classroom instruction and paid, on the job training to further refine employability skills. Students must provide their own transportation to class and work. Those students who are not yet job ready may enroll at Silver Star Vocational Center which is an Orange County post-secondary facility that prepares handicapped students ages 16-24 to become working citizens. Students are transported to this site by school bus, and a Florida Supported Employment Project has recently been initiated at this center.

We do recognize that a number of our students, particularly

those with multiple handicaps, will initially be unable to transition to competitive or supported employment; nor would they be appropriately served at our vo-tech centers. For these students, we have several quality community based placement alternatives available. Placement in these facilities usually requires that the student become a client of a state agency such as Developmental Services. If the student is not already a client, we will initiate the referral process.

COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

The local community colleges offer a variety of programs for students with disabilities. In addition to the availability of Disabled Students Services for all students with handicaps on campus, two types of high tech career training programs - computer assisted design (CADD) and computer programmer training (CPTD) - have been specifically designed for persons with physical impairments. We are anxious for our students to be able to transition into either of these training programs. In order to identify students who may be candidates, we have developed an introductory high school CAD course known as Autosketch. Students who take this class find out if they like computer
jobs and whether they have the aptitude for computer assisted design or computer programming.

By providing training at the high school level, students will be able to make better career decisions based on personal experience. As a part of this course, a field trip to the community college is included. The students then have a first hand opportunity to see the connection between their classes and the pre-requisite skills that are needed for entry into these community college programs.

CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING:

Students visit the local Center For Independent Living to see accessible apartments for the disabled. They have the opportunity to establish a first contact with the local agency that advocates for community living, accessibility, handicapped rights and employment. CIL staff members have provided a five part awareness series on independent living issues at our school. The county program coordinator pays a consultant fee for this service. Students and their families are encouraged to became involved in the various programs offered by the Center.

TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS

Based on the Carl Perkins Vocational Act, the Florida Department of Education requires that ESE school personnel must anticipate and plan for the students' post school needs

by the end of the junior year. We do this as part of the Annual Review (IEP) process. Students and parents are strongly encouraged to attend the meeting and representatives from other community agencies that serve or will serve the student (i.e. Developmental Services, V.R.) are invited to attend. The Individual Transition Planning (ITP) form is completed and attached to the IEP form.

While employment concerns receive priorty, there are other important issues that must be addressed if we are to meet the individual transition needs of each physically impaired student. Many of these needs will be life long. They include:

* Finance/ Income/ SSI
* Medical Needs
* Housing and Living Arrangements / Attendant Care
* Counseling/ Guidance Services
* Transportation
* Non Competetive Employment Options
* Other Agency Eligibility
* Personal/ Family Relationships
* Vocational Training Needs/ Post Secondary Education
* Technical Devices/ Services
* Leisure and Recreational Opportunities

The provisions of Public Law 94-142 guaranteeing students transportation, educationally relevant therapy services, and attendant care, do not continue once the student graduates from high school. While it is not the responsibility of the school district to provide services for all vocational and independent living needs, we believe it is our responsibility to discuss these issues. Therefore, the ITP meeting serves as a vehicle to identify areas of continued or potential need that the student will have as an adult. The meeting encourages the concerned individuals to address how and by whom these services can be provided. Educators and related services personnel have an obligation to prepare students and their parents to assume responsibility for obtaining the services they will require when they leave school. People are empowered to be more productive citizens and to participate in their communities in effective, meaningful ways when they acquire self-advocacy skills.

SUMMARY

In summary then, our transition program bridges the students' academic abilities, independent living skills, and vocational preparation. It is a collaborative process among educators, health professionals, parents, students, and community agencies. Its success depends on timely, thorough planning, and implementation of programs that are individually appropriate for our disabled employees of the future.